

Nile Basin Development Challenge Community Engagement Report: Fogera



**Fogera woreda, South Gondor, Ethiopia
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Background Information

The Nile Basin Development Challenge (NBDC) is implemented by a consortium led by the International Livestock Research Institute and the International Water Management Institute. It is funded by the CGIAR Challenge Program on Water and Food. The NBDC aims to improve the resilience of rural livelihoods in the Ethiopian highlands through a landscape approach to rainwater management.

The NBDC comprised five linked projects examining: 1. Learning from the past; 2. Developing integrated rainwater management strategies, 3. Targeting and scaling out of rainwater management innovations, 4. Assessing and anticipating the consequences of innovation in rainwater management systems; and 5. Catalysing platforms for learning, communication and coordination across projects. The project undertook work in three study sites: Jeldu, Diga and Fogera woredas.

The group working on 'developing integrated rainwater management strategies' organised 'community engagement exercises' in each woreda to identify key NRM challenges with the aim of informing innovation platform action research. In Fogera the decision was made to experiment with the use of participatory video as a tool for communicating community views to local decision makers who were involved with the innovation platforms.

Alan Duncan and Beth Cullen of ILRI worked together to develop the participatory video project, consulting on key issues with Gareth Benest from InsightShare with regards to the structure, methodology, approach and technical requirements for a successful process. Aberra Adie played a key role arranging logistics, facilitating and translating.

Rationale

A key issue in fostering change in rural systems is the power imbalance between farming communities and decision makers. Although it is increasingly acknowledged that approaches to NRM so far have been top down, there is still an issue of how to engage with local communities and bring them into the process. It is critical to address this because farmer participation is vital for the success of NRM and RWM activities.

In late 2011, a grant was awarded to the Nile Basin Development Challenge to investigate and document the effectiveness of participatory video as a tool to bring local issues to the attention of planners and implementers of rainwater management interventions in Ethiopia. ILRI (the leading organisation in the implementing consortium) invited InsightShare - a UK-based organisation specialising in participatory video - to assist in the delivery of the project and to take part in the reflections and documentation of those actions.

The purpose of the exercise was to use participatory video as a means of exploring perceptions of water management issues amongst farmers in Fogera woreda, to understand the effects of the various interventions being undertaken, and to work with farmers to devise recommendations for how these might be improved upon in the future.

In February 2012, Beth Cullen, Gareth Benest and Abera Adie (ILRI) jointly facilitated the participatory video project in Fogera, in the Amhara region of Ethiopia, with twelve farmers from three kebeles (small collections of villages) over the period of ten days. The process produced one 30-minute video on a range of water and land management issues. The video was screened within the three kebeles that were represented. Once community members had given their feedback the film was presented to innovation platform members and used to inform discussions about action research.

Approach

Three kebeles were chosen to represent upstream, midstream and downstream locations: Alemba, Diba Sifatre and Kokit respectively. Development Agents (DAs) from each kebele used criteria defined by NBDC researchers to select four participants: two female and two male of different ages, representing a range of socio-economic status.

The community engagement process began on 11th until 24th February 2012. Participatory rural appraisal tools and exercises were conducted to enable community members to identify their key resources and land and water management challenges. The results of these exercises and group discussions informed the topics that the participants chose to focus on in subsequent the participatory video. This report aims to document the results of the PRA exercises, but will not describe the participatory video process as this is documented elsewhere. See <http://nilebdc.org/tag/participatory-video/> for further details.

Alem Ber kebele - upstream

Participants were asked to draw the resources that were important to them for their livelihoods:



They were then asked to prioritise their most important resources and identify their priority challenges:

Most important resources:

Soil conservation structures, sand for construction, irrigation for vegetables

Challenges:

Crop disease, declining crop productivity, deforestation (causes low rainfall), difficult landscape

Prioritised challenge:

Soil erosion and deforestation

Diba sifatre kebele - midstream

Participants were asked to draw the resources that were important to them for their livelihoods:



They were then asked to prioritise their most important resources and identify their priority challenges:

Most important resources:

Oxen, water for irrigation, land for rice

Challenges:

Flooding during the wet season, crop pests and diseases, shortage of water for crop production, deforestation, declining crop yields

Prioritised challenge:

Gully formation

Kokit kebele - downstream

Participants were asked to draw the resources that were important to them for their livelihoods:



They were then asked to prioritise their most important resources and identify their priority challenges:

Most important resources:

Land for rice production, river water for irrigation, oxen

Challenges:

Water stress during dry season, water logging, crop pests and diseases, declining availability of river water

Prioritised challenge:

Water flooding and stress

	Alembere	Diba Sifatre	Kokit
1	Soil erosion and deforestation	Gully formation	Water flooding and stress
2	Crop disease	Flooding in wet season	Water stress in dry season
3	Declining crop productivity	Crop pests and diseases	Water logging
4	Deforestation	Water shortage for crop production	Crop diseases and pests
5	Difficult landscape	Deforestation and declining crop yields	Declining levels of river water

Additional cross-cutting issues:

Declining honey production, access to market (Kokit and Diba)

After participants from the three kebeles had identified and prioritised their main issues, they discussed the the main issues to focus on in the film. The three primary issues identified by the participants, in relation to land and water management within the three kebeles, were soil erosion (Alembere), gully formation (Diba) and water stress / logging (Kokit). Although some issues were common across the kebeles there were some differences in the issues that were prioritised depending on the kebele's location in the landscape. Alembere kebele which is in the highland area prioritised soil erosion, whereas Diba Sifatre and Kokit, both low-lying areas near to the Rib river prioritised flooding and water stress.

In addition to these issues, further discussions were held around the priority focus of the Innovation Platforms on the issues surrounding unrestricted grazing, and how the group might communicate their own perspectives on this issue. The group decided to incorporate the issue of unrestricted grazing as a priority.

A series of lengthy discussions and collective decision-making exercises was facilitated by Abera Adie around these issues and the ongoing efforts by the Ethiopia government to tackle these issues through various land and water management approaches. The participants collectively listed the pros and cons of these initiatives, from their perspectives, before making recommendations as to how they could be improved and strengthened.

Soil conservation work

Advantages

- Improved rice production
- Protects soils from erosion
- Leads to afforestation
- Stops changes to weather conditions
- River and springs are protected
- Soil fertility is changed

- Sorghum production improves

Disadvantages

- Poorly constructed bunds
- Some people are not willing to accept bunds because they decrease the size of their land
- Inadequate follow-up and management
- Some people do not commit to the work or consider it to be important
- Unrestricted grazing can destroy the work
- By-laws which punish people if the bunds are destroyed
- To complete the work in a short period of time people have to work together
- Participation of the community in the work is not equal

How can the soil conservation work be improved?

- This work requires sufficient time and materials
- It would be better if the NRM work is not conducted at the same time as cropping or harvesting
- Before starting the work the whole community (women, men, young and old) should be able to discuss it together
- Community needs to accept the implementation and follow-up activities as they are responsible for it
- Follow up from development groups is required
- The whole community should know the advantages and disadvantages
- The community should plant forages and different seedlings
- Timing of the work and punishments/penalties for not doing the work should be based on community agreement. The decision is given by the 1 to 5 groups. Women's participation is not recognized by the whole community.
- Seedlings are to be planted on bunds but the type of seedling was selected by agricultural experts
- After preparing a place for the seedlings, they arrive late
- There is limited willingness and acceptance
- People who do not participate in the soil conservation work have to be punished
- There should be adequate distribution of the work according to mandates set by the community
- Women's participation in development activities has to be recognized

Restricting 'free grazing' (controlling livestock movements)

Advantages

- Decreases dissemination of disease
- Decreases damage to grazing land
- Decreases the number of livestock feeding on crops
- Reduces energy expenditure of livestock so their body weight will increase
- Conflict between members of the community will be reduced
- Children can go to school and parent's can get rest
- Trees will be grown and they will bring clouds/rain to the area
- Bunds will not be damaged

Disadvantages

- Despite various meetings not all community members have agreed on the issue, most farmers have no grazing land
- During the rainy season there is a shortage of livestock feed so it is difficult to tether animals and feed them
- If livestock are tethered those who rely on communal grazing areas for dung collection will have no dung for fuel
- If livestock movements are restricted there will not be enough feed, community members have not had enough time to prepare
- There is limited awareness among the community of the benefits
- There are people who have livestock but no land - how will they grow fodder for their animals?
- The community relies on communal areas for breeding purposes, there is no bull service for breeding so what will happen when livestock are restricted?
- There is not enough land available to share with children and livestock
- There is a perception among the community that the government is fencing grazing areas to give to landless youth or others (land redistribution)
- If livestock are tethered there is no feed, if livestock are free there are not enough children to herd them
- Decreases soil fertility

How can the attempts to restrict grazing be improved?

- Grazing land can be fenced and 'cut and carry' system can be introduced for people who have grazing land
- The community should discuss the issue together and come to agreement
- The community should be able to decide on the interventions because the issues concern the community
- More time should be given for the community to discuss these issues
- Community members and experts should come together to discuss the advantages and disadvantages of restricted grazing
- Community leaders and decision makers should all participate in discussions
- People who have livestock but no grazing land can buy grass from others, if they have enough income
- Livestock numbers should be reduced
- People should collect and store feed when it is available and use it to feed livestock during times of feed shortage

Water stress and flooding

Participants from Diba and Kokit kebeles highlighted water related issues: their area is flooded during the rainy season. The flooding destroys crops and water logging causes problems for livestock as they are not able to find feed. The same area becomes very dry during the dry season, which affects crop yields particularly onion, oats, chickpea, vetch and tomato. There is too much water in the rainy season and not enough water in the dry season. Farmers were concerned that little was being done to address this issue. As there is no formal government interventions the participants discussed the causes and potential solutions for this issue.

Causes

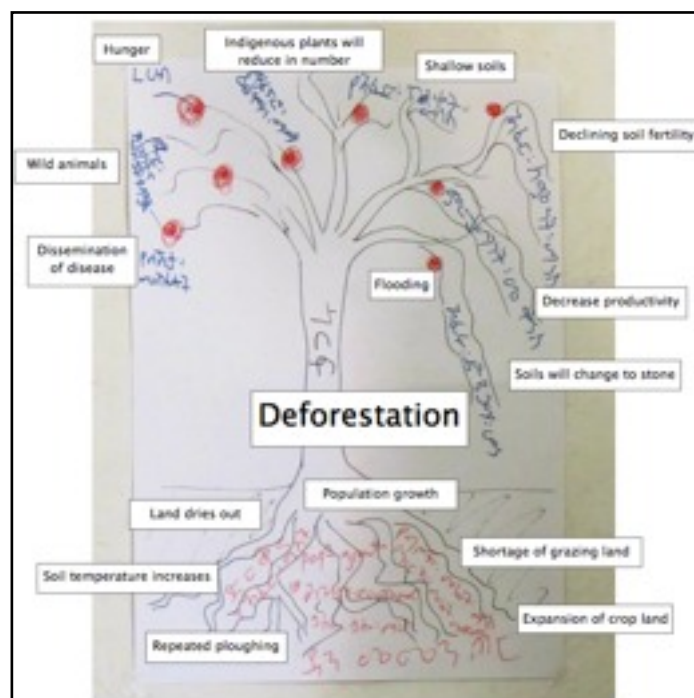
There are many motor pumps operating in Kokit kebele, neighboring kebeles (Diba Sifatra and Rib Gabriel) also rely on the same water (from the Rib river). They retain the water upstream and as a result farmers in Kokit kebele face a water shortage. Some crops get enough water but others do not. The level of water in the river gets low during the dry season. Because of this fish lose their habitat. When the river was full there was a lot of fish.

(While there was in-depth discussion regarding the causes for water shortages there was little if any discussion of the causes of flooding. This also applied to their discussions about solutions. It seemed that their main cause of concern was for water scarcity during the dry season due to the impact on crop yields.)

How can the problem of water stress be addressed?

- Participants felt that the community should make a common plan to decide who uses pumps for irrigation and when, particularly during times of year when water is scarce.
- Community members should discuss the type of crops to be planted, for example if it is found that onions consume a lot of water then crops which do not require a lot of water should be planted instead
- Participants advocated for the use of penalties/punishments for people who do not adhere to the community plan.
- Participants felt strongly that these decisions should be reached through community discussion and agreement, but that expert assistance was also required to find appropriate solutions.
- They suggested that the government should assist in the construction of a dam to collect water on the Rib River for more equitable distribution (this suggestion was possibly related to a dam that is already under construction upstream but not yet functional).

Problem tree: deforestation



Participatory Video

The results of the PRA exercises were used to develop storyboard for the participatory video. The resulting film is divided into three chapters:

The film is divided into the following three chapters:

Part One: Explores the subject of unrestricted grazing and includes participants discussing why some believe it should be restricted, how they have learned about those reasons, their fears for if/when their grazing patterns are restricted - insufficient fodder, lack of dung for fuel, landlessness amongst many farmers, and lack of breeding opportunities for cattle - and what needs to be done to ensure it is positive for the community at large.

Part Two: Looks at issues relating to water stress. In this section, participants documented the destruction of crops through flooding in the rainy season, drought in the dry season, water logging reducing fodder harvests, over cultivation, low-productivity of staple and cash crops. They also explore the competition between kebeles for the dwindling supplies of water during times of drought and the need for community-based regulation of extraction.

Part Three: Delves into the soil erosion experienced by many in the region and explores the government organised soil conservation responses. Participants discuss some of the challenges and difficulties these initiatives have caused for them directly, including the impact of communal activities organised during harvest time and the subsequent loss of income and food, lack of childcare available to families working on the projects, inconsistency of punishments for those not attending, lack of community consultation, lack of proper tools and saplings for planting on soil bunds etc.

See the video here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7SSOm1hsCsE>

See blog posts here: <http://nilebdc.org/tag/participatory-video/>

General observations

The subject matter under consideration by the participants is clearly sensitive due to the context. This meant that open, unbiased exploration of land and water management issues, as understood by participants, was not as possible as would be preferred when undertaking a process of this kind. Facilitators felt that the participants were at times repeating a dominant narrative regarding land and water management issues. It is likely that they were influenced to some degree by the sustainable land management campaign that had taken place in the area prior to the PV exercise.

Facilitators may have unduly influenced the selection and prioritization of issues. This was partly due to the project objectives which focused on land and water management, this therefore set certain parameters for the discussions. The exercise was also undertaken with a view to communicating community views to innovation platform members. The PV participants had not participated in the NBDC innovation platform meetings so were unaware of the discussions and interventions being proposed by the IP members. Facilitators informed the participants of the issue that had been selected by the Fogera platform for action: namely that of unrestricted grazing. This issue did not emerge in community prioritization of issues, but it was discussed and later focused on in the participatory video. The proposed plans for restricting grazing are undoubtedly connected to the sustainable land management campaign - this is unlikely to be successful if livestock movements are not constrained due to the damage caused to physical and biological structures. However, there seems to have been little consultation with community members and the PV participants raised a number of potential challenges to restricting livestock grazing in the area. It seems that there is a substantial divide between the views and perceptions of community members and decision makers that will need to be bridged if interventions are to be successful.

An issue that seemed to greatly concern the participants, particularly those from Diba Sifatra and Kokit kebeles, was the issue of water stress. Facilitators perhaps did not probe the participants in sufficient depth about this issue, particularly the causes. Although these were indirectly referred to during group discussions, as links were made between soil erosion, land management and flooding. This is an area that requires more follow up by NBDC researchers, perhaps using different methods of inquiry.

The project was successful in recording community views as articulated by the participants. Discussions with the participants made clear that they were involved in the project as representatives of their communities and this was a message the participants appeared to understand clearly and a role they took seriously. The extent to which the views expressed during the PRA exercises and in their final video are truly representative of the communities views is difficult, perhaps impossible to judge, as the views expressed almost certainly include the messages and perspectives they have been exposed too through various other means and activities. These may or may not be identical to those of the community as a whole or the individuals taking part in the process.

Next Steps

Facilitators conducted a screening and reflection day with staff at ILRI (see here for details: <http://nilebdc.wikispaces.com/NBDC+participatory+research+approaches>). The film containing the prioritized issues was later screened to community members within the three kebeles. These community members then gave their feedback to the film. This was followed by a screening to the Innovation Platform members.

Through the screening of these videos to targeted audiences, including the Innovation Platforms, it is hoped by the facilitators and participants that adjustments and improvements could be made to the interventions in accordance with the recommendations made by the participants. The voices contained in the video are not necessarily heard in the forums through which decisions that affect the communities represented are made. Participatory approaches such as this project are excellent vehicles for introducing these voices into such decision-making processes to improve the interventions and their outcomes, and for promoting greater dialogue between the different parties. Whether or not this project and the video created by the farmers participating will ultimately have the impacts hoped for remains to be seen but the opportunity is there.